

What Do You Think?

Featuring clips from Lifetime's *Any Day Now* and youth from The Empower Program in Washington, D.C.

Narrator:

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 sparked a civil rights movement that demanded equality in all areas of life for all Americans. While this movement successfully broke down barriers and changed our society, we still face many struggles today. At The Empower Program in Washington, D.C., this youth group seeks solutions to some of society's biggest problems: sexism, racism, violence...

Shanterra McBride, youth moderator:

We're going to watch a video of two different shows. And we're just going to have a discussion. We're just going to be very free about it and just say whatever you feel. It's the show called *Any Day Now* that comes on Lifetime. And so, let's just watch.

Any Day Now, "It's a Good Thing I'm Not Black," July 2000

Question:

When is it appropriate to use race as a factor in law enforcement?

- A. Always
- B. Never
- C. Sometimes
- D. I'm not sure

Narrator:

The issue of racially biased policing has been a controversial topic in the United States for many years.

Rebecca, youth:

I agree that it has a lot to do with power.

Arthur, youth:

Some of them shouldn't be police.

Naeem, youth:

It's not right.

Rebecca, youth:

It's one of those things when you're embarrassed almost to be white.

Bria, youth:

You let them go by just because he's black and you're black.

Officer Royce, Any Day Now:

Race is only one factor in a profile.

Robert, youth:

No matter what color they are, it's kind of hard not to stereotype.

Shanterra, youth moderator:

In this scene from the show, Renee is questioning two police officers following the arrest of a young man named Billy Reubens. Billy was pulled over and arrested on suspicion of a crime he didn't commit. He was later released and Renee believes the police targeted him because he is African American.

Renee, Any Day Now:

You claim you stopped my client because he fit the description of a robbery suspect. What was that description?

Officer 2, Any Day Now:

I can't recall exactly at this time.

Renee, Any Day Now:

Mrs. Lockia, didn't you prep your client?

Mrs. Lockia, Any Day Now:

He can't tell you what he can't recall Ms. Jackson.

Renee, Any Day Now:

Well, let me refresh your memory. The only description that even remotely fits my client is that of an African American male, 30 to 40 years of age, salt and pepper short-cropped hair, moustache, beard, dark brown skin. Ring any bells?

Officer 2, Any Day Now:

I can't recall exactly at this time.

Officer Royce, Any Day Now:
I can't recall exactly at this time.

Renee, Any Day Now:
Officer Royce, do you use racial profiling?

Officer Royce, Any Day Now:
Race is only one factor in a profile; it is not an entire profile.

Renee, Any Day Now:
What exactly is a profile?

Officer Royce, Any Day Now:
You look at a particular type of crime, say drug traffic, you look at the statistics of arrests and convictions and you find a commonality among a majority of perpetrators.

Renee, Any Day Now:
Commonality such as race, perhaps?

Officer Royce, Any Day Now:
As I said, race is only one factor.

Shanterra, youth moderator:
In many cases, communities and individuals have fought back in the courts, alleging that law enforcement officers inappropriately use race when deciding whom to detain. Many of these cases appear to reveal patterns of bias within law enforcement agencies. Whether or not these patterns exist we must ask ourselves the following question:

Question:
When is it okay to use race as a factor in law enforcement?

Jiselle, youth:
Always, because the cops need to use any tools available to them to catch the criminals to help the community be a safe place. And if it means using race then they need to use it.

Naeem, youth:
Never. We live in a democratic society. Targeting people of a certain race is not fair.

Bria, youth:

Sometimes it is necessary to use race as a factor in a case if they have specific information that perhaps an African American or white or Hispanic did the crime. But they should not take prejudice against the entire race and use aggressive force against the race in an inappropriate manner.

Rebecca, youth:

I'm not sure. I think it's a very complicated issue. Sometimes I think it's appropriate, but other times I think it would lead to more serious issues like racism. I think I'll need to know more facts before I can judge this.

Question:

Did hearing them change your mind?

Any Day Now, "Nothing Personal," September 2000

Question:

When is it appropriate to give preferential treatment based on race?

- A. Always
- B. Never
- C. Sometimes
- D. I'm not sure

Narrator:

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed an executive order requiring government agencies and contractors to "take affirmative action" to ensure equality in all aspects of employment. The law was meant to increase opportunity for groups that had historically experienced discrimination, such as minorities and women. Over time, the term Affirmative Action has come to imply providing advantages and opportunities to some groups over others. Such policies are at the center of a great controversy.

Robert, youth:

It's like, are you going to support your race, are you going to support your friends.

Bria, youth:

The big white boy companies will all hire each other.

Jiselle, youth:

But when it's Caucasian we think that they're assuming too much. It's not about their race.

M.E., Any Day Now:

When someone treats a person different because of their race, that's discrimination!

Arthur, youth:

He didn't get the job, so he was looking for another reason to blame.

Rebecca, youth:

Like whites have been so used to getting things and always being on top for so long.

Renee, Any Day Now:

He sees any opportunity given to black people as a setback for whites.

Bria, youth:

When things don't go their way, they pull out the race card.

Jiselle, youth:

I think it's kind of ironic that white people are dealing with discrimination.

Shanterra, youth moderator:

In this scene from the show, M.E. and Renee are meeting for lunch to discuss a conflict they have: M.E.'s husband, Collyer, did not get a construction job on a government project. He thinks it is because he is white and the general contractor wants to hire only African Americans. He has decided to sue the general contractor. The problem is, the contractor that he is suing is Renee's client.

Renee, Any Day Now:

Can't you talk Collyer out of this lawsuit?

M.E., Any Day Now:

Why would I do that? I'm the one who told him to do it. Besides, I think he's sort of right.

Renee, Any Day Now:

What do you mean "sort of"?

M.E., Any Day Now:

Look, when someone treats a person different because of their race, that's discrimination.

Renee, Any Day Now:

And it's reverse discrimination now because white people are suffering instead of black?

M.E., Any Day Now:

Whaddya think, black people got a monopoly on suffering?

Renee, Any Day Now:

No, but we have a hell of a lot more experience at it. And equating 300 years of slavery, discrimination and racism with losing a drywall contract is insulting and don't you tell me you disagree.

M.E., Any Day Now:

That's not what this about at all.

Renee, Any Day Now:

But that's what Shackleford is going to imply. He sees any opportunity given to black people as a setback for whites. Losing power is what he's afraid of and he will use any legal argument to hold on to it.

Shanterra, youth moderator:

The question of how to ensure that everyone in our society has equal opportunities is a difficult one. We asked our youth forum to debate this question. But first, we'd like to hear from all of you. Let's take a poll.

Question:

When is it okay to give preferential treatment based on race?

Rebecca, youth:

It is always necessary to give preferential treatment based on race and to minorities because they have been struggling and had so many disadvantages for so long that now they need extra advantages just to create equality.

Jiselle, youth:

Never, because race shouldn't play a role in anything. You should be considered by your experiences or for your qualifications.

Bria, youth:

sometimes it is necessary to use race to help minorities advance in certain areas. Other times it can just cause discrimination and that's wrong so both sides have their disadvantages.

Arthur, youth:

I don't know when it's okay to give preferential treatment based on race because we don't have a level playing field for minorities to succeed, but we don't want to give them opportunities they didn't earn, and we want to be fair.

Question:

Did hearing them change your mind?

Shanterra, youth moderator:

As I've said, these questions can be tough and the answers are not yet clear to anyone. What's important is to keep an open dialogue.